

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union > www.fbu.org.uk

July 2013

FBU CONFERENCE REPORT

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Still fighting for justice

Ricky Tomlinson tells FBU delegates his story
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Matt Wrack

Our plans to defend the service

The FBU held a successful conference in May to reflect on the past year and to make plans for the period ahead. Some of the key discussions and decisions are reported in this magazine. As always, we will provide a full record of proceedings which members should scrutinise and discuss with brigade officials.

We were privileged to host actor and socialist Ricky Tomlinson, who explained how he is still fighting for justice decades after being victimised for trade union activities. His fighting spirit in the face of huge injustice was plain to see. His humour in the face of adversity was also inspiring.

What struck me most about the conference was the seriousness with which delegates went about our business. Views were exchanged, disagreements were aired, but in a comradely fashion. And, importantly, we came to important decisions to prepare ourselves for the struggles ahead.

Media manipulation

One particular episode is worth recounting, as it shows what we are up against. On the last night of conference we learned that the government was going to release Ken Knight's report on so-called efficiencies in the fire and rescue service.

We were told it was embargoed until 6am the following morning (the Friday). News organisations had been told that under no

circumstances could it be shared with the FBU before that time. It was a blatant attempt at media management – the government wanted to grab the news headlines, disrupt our conference and score some points.

However our delegates responded magnificently. National officials were dispatched to the nearest media studios to answer Ken Knight, while officials in brigades dealt with local media. By the end of the day, scores of FBU representatives had spoken to the press, radio and television.

We can expect more of this. But we can articulate the issues because we know the job better than anyone. Firefighters stand up not just for ourselves but for the service we work in and the public we serve. Whenever we get the chance, we must be the professional voice of the fire and rescue service.

Knight cap

This magazine includes some brief answers to Ken Knight's report. We think the report is a fig leaf for the government to impose more cuts on the fire and rescue service. The government spending review is likely to announce further cuts for 2015-16 and the Labour leadership has indicated it will stick to these plans if it forms a government.

Meanwhile political and economic think tanks are predicting that, whoever wins the election in 2015, there will be austerity until 2020. This underlines the importance of



June: FBU members and supporters protest against the proposed closure of London's Clerkenwell and Kingsland fire stations

fighting every cut now. We cannot allow them to slash our service without a fight.

We have seen excellent campaigning in various parts of the country. Firefighters and local people have been opposing cuts in Devon and Somerset. Recent mobilisations in London have shown wide public support for firefighters and strong opposition to fire cuts. Local demonstrations at Belsize Park and at Clerkenwell fire stations – both threatened with closure – have seen local people, trade unionists and the FBU join forces to oppose London mayor Boris Johnson's plans. Wherever local campaigns are developed, the union provides essential support with campaign materials and media advice. We will need to step this aspect of our work up over the coming months.

Pensions

The pensions situation remains fluid. The government's current proposals are unworkable. Their own report shows the problems they have created. Their proposals will drive firefighters out of a job on capability grounds. This will wreck the service and the pension scheme as well.

We know that civil servants and their media spin-doctors at Westminster are busy briefing against the FBU. We know that the devolved administrations simply blame Westminster and try to avoid any responsibility themselves. We know the employers share many of our concerns but, so far, have sought to avoid their responsibilities in relation to fitness standards and the threat of capability dismissals.

What is needed is for others within the service to face up to their responsibilities. We need politicians and the employers' representatives to negotiate honestly with the FBU to find a solution. Our officials are ready and willing to engage. But we need them to address the serious problems we have raised.

Talks are ongoing. They are often complex and they are increasingly technical. The FBU has the expertise to address all aspects of these discussions. But we need members to remain ready for action if government fails to listen.



Follow the general secretary on Twitter: @MattWrack

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STEFANO CAGNONI



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LETTER

FBU at the international firefighters thanksgiving service

I was honoured to represent the FBU at the annual international firefighters thanksgiving service on 12 May at the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire.

Standard bearers and ceremonial squads from many of the fire and rescue services from throughout the UK were there, as were firefighters and senior officers from most brigades. There was a large turnout for the ceremony.

The band and pipes of the West Midlands fire service provided the music.

I laid a wreath on behalf of the national FBU, in memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

The firefighters' memorial garden is a tranquil area. Four benches there were consecrated on 13 May, enabling visitors to sit comfortably to reflect and remember.

I hope in future years more FBU members will attend this memorial to honour those who have lost their lives and an occasion when all sides are joined in unity.

Rose Jones
FBU executive council member for the West Midlands

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FBU conference delegates applaud the pension campaigns decision

Continuing talks include retained duty pensions

Pensions

The FBU executive council met twice in June to discuss developments around the attacks on FBU members' pensions. This followed a debate at the union's conference in Blackpool which resulted in new trade disputes being registered.

Delegates were clear that the union needed to start making preparations for industrial action, but that it should also seek every opportunity to meet ministers and others to attempt to resolve the issues.

The executive council received reports on developments relating to pensions. Various discussions are still under way, including attempts to address a number of detailed and technical matters.

These are currently being considered by our actuarial advisers in dialogue with the Government Actuary's Department. Discussions with ministers in the different

parts of the UK are also under way or planned.

The executive council also heard further reports on the continuing delay in the introduction of the modified pension scheme for retained members. This is a requirement as a result of the FBU legal victory for retained/part-time members in 2006. The union has written to ministers on several occasions about this and has raised the issue directly at meetings in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as at Westminster.

Insult to retained firefighters

Despite these discussions, the delay has continued and the arrangements for the modified scheme are still not in place. The FBU said this was an insult to retained duty firefighters.

The executive council agreed to examine ways in which concern about the delays in the introduction of the scheme for retained members could be brought into the wider

pension campaign. Head office officials were authorised to take legal advice on this.

The executive council recognised that a number of important meetings on pensions are already scheduled or are being arranged. These could provide additional opportunities to take our arguments to key individuals.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The executive council noted that the situation remains fluid, is subject to rapid change and that sensitive discussion may be required to resolve our dispute.

"The executive council agreed not to issue an immediate ballot notice but to assess the outcome of these talks. It is important that members recognise that this could be a temporary delay and that the situation is being constantly reassessed."

Wrack said the situation would be reviewed at the next meeting of the executive council and that additional meetings would be scheduled to take account of the situation.

Pat Carberry:
Gay marriage
is about equal
rights for all

STEFANO CAGNONI



www.fbu.org.uk

Another near disaster piles pressure on mayor

Cuts

The FBU has called on London mayor Boris Johnson to abandon plans to make deep cuts to the London Fire Brigade after another incident in which crews from a station earmarked for closure carried out a dramatic rescue.

Firefighters from the threatened Silvertown fire station in Newham were first on the scene at a serious blaze in an industrial unit on 6 June. They rescued a man trapped on the first floor.

The fire was so severe that a further seven engines were mobilised to attend, including one from Whitechapel fire station, which stands to lose an engine under the mayor's cuts. It took nearly five hours to bring the blaze under control.

Paul Embury, FBU regional secretary for London, said: "We've said all along that these cuts will threaten lives, and this latest dramatic incident in Silvertown demonstrates why that is so.

"The casualty was in a desperate situation and, if the response time had been a few seconds longer, he may not have survived. Silvertown crews were operating for some minutes before they received back-up, so we can reasonably assume that this casualty owes a lot – perhaps even his life – to Silvertown fire station.

"These cuts are dangerous and wrong. Last month we saw the release of bombshell data which showed how response times for some Londoners will



Local residents, supporters and members of other unions followed the FBU fire engine as it led a protest against the planned closure of central London's Clerkenwell fire station

double after the cuts. In our service, seconds really do count, and those seconds can be the difference between life and death for people trapped in fires."

The mayor wants to close 12 stations, remove 18 engines and slash 520 frontline firefighter posts, even though his own fire authority voted against the plans. Public consultation ended on 17 June.

SOUNDING OFF

Gay marriage

What's it all about? Pat Carberry, FBU LGBT secretary, explains

Gay marriage has become an active debate globally in recent years. It is an issue that affects a small minority of society, yet it has attracted some of the most vociferous debate in both support and opposition.

As a gay man, I thought it was all quite simple. We have civil partnership – but it is widely considered as an inferior recognition of the legal union between two people.

It is supposed to carry the same entitlements as marriage, but can at times be confusing to others, with simple misunderstandings like introducing your "partner" and being asked what type of business we are in.

Same-sex marriage is already recognised in 13 countries and many others are debating its introduction. Discussion has been lengthy, with the recent House of Commons debate lasting three days.

A red herring that is often used relates to religious establishments being forced to conduct same sex-marriage.

This simply is not the case. It is purely about the title "marriage".

Some politicians decided to make same-sex marriage a fundamental part of their election campaigns. In last year's US race for the White House, the Republican Party was completely opposed, but Democrats were in support. This polarised the LGBT vote – potentially 6% of the electorate. President Obama won with a majority of only 2.8%.

This lesson seems to have been learnt by David Cameron. Despite risking the loss of grassroots Tory support and splitting his party, he acknowledges that public opinion is clearly on the side of supporting same-sex marriage and that minorities' needs are ignored at one's peril.

Ten years ago same-sex marriage in the UK was just a pipe dream. But we stand at the brink of it becoming a reality. I for one look forward to the day that I can call my partner of 11 years my husband.

NJC agrees 1% pay increase

Pay

The National Joint Council (NJC), the UK-wide body that deals with firefighters' pay and conditions, met on 4 June and discussed a number of issues including a pay settlement for 2013. As a result, a pay increase of 1.0% on all NJC rates of pay has been agreed.

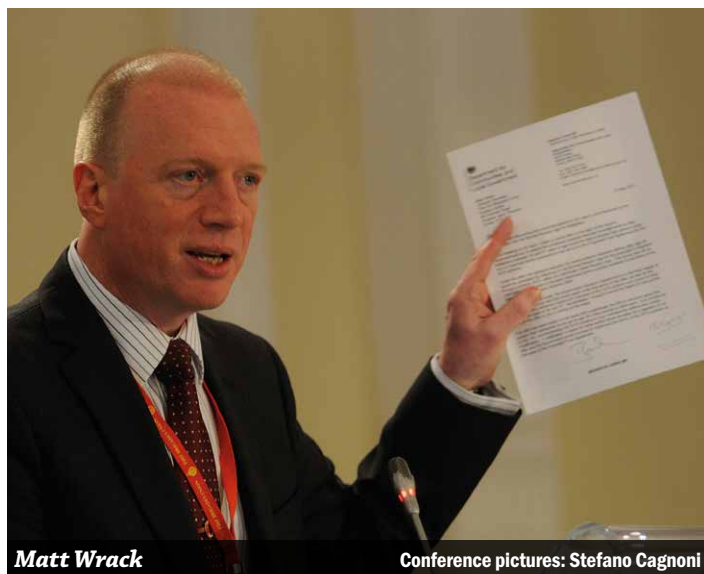
The NJC also agreed that continual professional development (CPD) payments should increase by 1.0%.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said FBU regional and sectional committees would receive a report from the executive council meeting that took place before the agreement

was reached. "Brigade officials will then be in a position to report back fully to members of brigade committees on the circumstances that gave rise to this agreement at the NJC," he said.

NJC circulars announcing this and related matters are on the FBU website.

FBU Conference 2013



Matt Wrack

Conference pictures: Stefano Cagnoni

FBU will not stand by as pensions 'ransacked'

Pensions warning

FBU conference in Blackpool put the government on notice that firefighters will take national strike action unless it comes up with a workable pension scheme.

FBU general secretary **Matt Wrack** said the union wanted to avoid strike action, but would not stand by and see pensions "ransacked".

Delegates, many wearing teeshirts showing firefighters with walking sticks, backed



Cameron Matthews

the union's strategy.

Cameron Matthews

(Cambridgeshire) argued that "doing nothing is not an option". He quoted anti-slavery campaigner

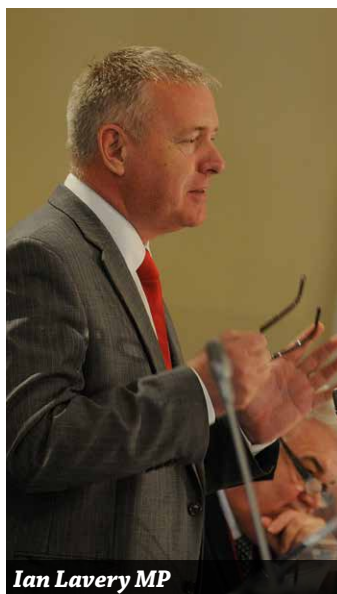
Frederick Douglass: "Power concedes nothing without a demand".

Union focus is on pay, jobs and pensions

Presidential address

FBU president **Alan McLean** reiterated that the union's focus is on firefighters' pay, pensions and jobs. He said the FBU had to tackle longstanding issues such as safety and new risks such as terrorism.

McLean warned delegates that there were ministers and senior civil servants "marauding around Whitehall, looking for opportunities to attack us".



Ian Lavery MP

Public pay for privatisation

No to privatisation

Labour MP **Ian Lavery** told firefighters to "fight until your dying breath against privatisation, because it won't just be yourselves or your families who will suffer as a consequence of

privatisation, it'll be the public who rely on services."

The former National Union of Mineworkers president said he had been waiting 30 years to thank firefighters for the "camaraderie, solidarity and friendship" showed to striking miners.

Knight report 'fig leaf for cuts'

Future of the fire service

Firefighters vowed to resist cuts after former chief fire advisor Ken Knight had called for the service to be slashed.

General secretary Matt Wrack

said his report was a "fig leaf" that failed to hide the Tories' ideological assault. He warned that it was a blatant attempt to soften up opinion for potentially fatal Tory cuts, set to be announced in June's spending review.





FBU president Alan McLean (right) and Matt Wrack applaud Frances O'Grady's speech

Cuts cost lives, says TUC leader

TUC backs firefighters

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady told the conference that "cuts cost lives – every part of the country is at risk from this postcode lottery of cuts and closures".

She said: "We need to build a stronger, more democratic, more equal country for the long term. A country which has decent work, decent services and decent living standards for all."

Backing for links with councillors

Combatting austerity



Dave Williams

Dave Williams

(West Yorkshire) moved a resolution applauding the stance taken by some Labour councillors who have refused to vote to implement cuts.

Delegates called for

closer links between unions and councillors opposed to the Tory-led government's austerity agenda.

➔ **Ricky Tomlinson, the Royle Family and Brookside actor who was jailed for trade union activity, spoke at a well-attended fringe meeting – see page 10**



Delegates voted on the union's priorities

Call for research on cancer and firefighting

Cancer at work

Conference hosted a moving discussion about the impact of cancer on firefighters in all roles in the service. **Paul Trew** (Hampshire) spoke from personal experience, while **Mandy Buchanan** (CSNC) spoke of the high incidence of cancer among control staff, including an officer she had worked with. National officer **Paul Woolstenholmes** pledged that the union would survey members and called on the government to research links between firefighting and cancers.

New report on fatalities

Safety first

General secretary Matt Wrack told conference: "It's a disgrace that people are being killed because senior managers are not learning from their mistakes".

Ten firefighters had been killed on duty since 2008, when the union produced a report revealing

major risks to firefighters.

Lothian and Borders delegate

Denise Christie described the death of Ewan Williamson at a fire in 2009. She said: "Every day our members are being put at risk because of management inaction."

The union will produce a new report on the lessons of recent firefighter fatalities.



Denise Christie

Strong union finances vital, says treasurer

Financial statement

Dave Limer, the newly-elected national treasurer, reported that, despite austerity

and job cuts, the union's finances had made a small surplus in the previous year. This was absolutely vital, he said, "to ensure that the FBU remains strong and independent".



Andy Dark

Terrorism talks are continuing

Marauding terrorism

Assistant general secretary Andy Dark told conference of ongoing negotiations with government over marauding terrorism – incidents like the killings in

Mumbai, India and Norway in recent years.

The executive council was seeking to defend members, funds and professional standards in the context of very challenging proposals, he said.



Helen Harrison

Sickening statistics

Rape awareness

Conference voted to support a rape awareness campaign supported by the FBU national women's committee. Helen Harrison told the conference: "The statistics on rape, and particularly the low reporting and low conviction rates, shocked and sickened us." According to the Ministry of Justice, every year 85,000 women and several thousand men in England and Wales are raped. Over 400,000 women are sexually assaulted and one in five women aged 16 to 59 has experienced sexual violence at some point since the age of 16.

VIEW

FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM





'We rescue people, not banks'

David Bueno, a senior board representative from the Spanish CC.OO union which represents firefighters, explains the neoliberal austerity measures they face

Spanish firefighters face neoliberal cuts from the right-wing People's Party (PP) government, which uses the same argument about the economic crisis and the need for necessary "adjustments" to get out of it as do other European governments.

Policies implemented in the fire services, both regionally and locally, mean there are fewer operational firefighters. This puts the safety of the public and firefighters at risk.

We also face increasing privatisation, problems with equipment and PPE, and with fire engines rented from private contractors.

Since 2007 the retirement age of Spanish firefighters has been 60. The agreement that brought this about contained provisions for the creation of new jobs, with staff replacement to enable the maintenance of public services provided by firefighters. But senior managers are taking advantage of the agreement to reduce crews.

They are also making efforts to develop "volunteer" fire groups and non-professional, "civil protection groups", with the sole aim of replacing professional public services.

In addition, Spanish firefighters have faced wage reductions and increased working hours. Such policies are being applied across the board to Spanish public services in general.

In these times it is essential to have strong unions supported by workers to organise a united fight back.

Valencia, Spain: A demonstrating firefighter's sign reads: 'We rescue people, not banks'. Firefighters have refused to help evict people from their homes when banks have tried to repossess them for rent or mortgage arrears

MANUEL BRUQUE/EPA/CORBIS



PICTURES: STEFANO CAGNONI

Still acting up for JUSTICE

Francis Beckett was impressed by
Ricky Tomlinson at FBU conference

What if, when you're still a young man, you get thrown in jail on trumped-up political charges, and when you're blacklisted for the only trade you know and you can't earn a living and feed your children?

Maybe you give the best of yourself to the task of fighting to expose the injustice. That's principled, but it can poison your life. Or maybe you put it behind you, find something else you're good at, never mention the injustice again, and get on with your life. No one will begrudge you your happiness, but you'll always have the feeling you let the perpetrators get away with it.

Actor and trade unionist

It's almost impossible to get the best of both worlds, but Ricky Tomlinson managed it. These days the world

knows Ricky, now 73, as a wonderfully gifted comic actor, best known as Bobby Grant in *Brookside*, DCI Charlie Wise in *Cracker* and Jim Royle in *The Royle Family*. I caught him on television the other day contributing to a profile of Norman Wisdom, whom he knew and liked.

But back in 1972 he was best known as one of the building workers unaccountably sent to prison after they led a successful strike. And he doesn't forget for a moment. His politics are those he learned from reading *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* in prison.

He reckons he manages to combine the two because of his unconquerable sense of humour. I suspect he was also helped by his quick wit and the gruff Liverpool voice that makes him sound as though he gargles with gravel. He's done so well in show business that in

2008 he was able to give £200,000 to a favourite charity, the Human Milk Bank of Cheshire and North Wales, which provides babies on special care baby units with milk from donor mothers.

His acting career came out of compering in Liverpool clubs and working as an extra.

FBU conference

Both sides of Ricky were on display at the FBU conference, where, one evening after the debating ended, delegates crowded into a basement room to hear him. He told the story of the 13-week strike, but he told it like a master storyteller – not too much detail, and studded with jokes.

He told us about conditions in the building industry, working for McAlpine – a company for which he has the deepest contempt. "If you wanted to go to the lavatory you either found a tree



or took a cement bag, or you went home and you lost your pay. Someone was killed every single day in the building industry. Yet I can't remember a boss ever going to jail over it."

Ricky went to jail, though. He told us how they'd gone back to work after the 13-week strike on 16 September 1972, having won on pay but not on conditions.

Just four days later it emerged that the employers' organisation was building a dossier on the strike leaders to give to home secretary Robert Carr. They wanted Ricky and the others to be charged with conspiracy. The attorney general advised that there was no prospect of conviction, but Carr went ahead anyway.

Ricky is very funny about the utterly disproportionate allocation of resources – which is lucky, because if he didn't find it funny, it would make him unbearably angry every time he thought of it.

"We were taken in black Marias with outriders and police vans with dogs, and I thought, something wrong here, we only went on strike."

Imprisoned

He arrived a few minutes late for the first day of the trial and there were 4,000 police round the building. "They weren't going to let me in, and I'm f***ing sorry they did. They said: 'You can't go in. It's full'. I said, 'I'm on trial'. They said: 'Oh, all right, then, we'll make an



exception'. The trial lasted 55 days and cost £1 million."

He was sentenced to two years in prison, and now, four decades later, he wants to know why. Who stitched him up? Who put pressure on ministers and the judiciary, and who told the jury that they could safely find him guilty because he'd only get a £50 fine?

Exactly how did the building industry and the Conservative government combine to send him and the other strike leaders to prison?

The papers should have been released in 2003, but this isn't a secret the British establishment is going to reveal without a fight. Justice secretary Kenneth Clarke looked at them and took a decision.

"They're not even to be looked at until 2021," Ricky told FBU delegates. "I'm 73, the oldest of the pickets is 85, the youngest is 65. We want to know how we were stitched up."

They're getting up a petition. It's not being done electronically – Ricky suspects that the e-petition system run by Downing Street is rigged – so he asked us all to sign a paper petition.

For more information about the Shrewsbury 24 campaign, please go to:
shrewsbury24campaign.org.uk/

"I'm 73, the oldest is 85, the youngest is 65. We want to know how we were stitched up"



RIGHT QUESTIONS, WRONG ANSWERS

Fire minister Brandon Lewis has been briefing MPs against the FBU. *Firefighter busts the myths*

Fire minister Brandon Lewis and a legion of senior civil servants are busy spinning their message to MPs and the media. The FBU has obtained a "Briefing for MPs on the Firefighters' Pension Scheme reforms" which is full of half-truths and evasions.

Firefighter has provided some answers to set the record straight.

When can these benefits be accessed?

They say: "Members of the 2015 scheme will be able to access their pension from age 55 ... The reduction will be calculated on improved terms for those members retiring from age 57."

Reality: These provisions are no use if most firefighters cannot maintain operational fitness beyond 55. The Williams report for DCLG says that, on a worst-case



STEFANO CANNONI

Stop evading the issues and negotiate with the FBU

All the best-case scenarios being used by the government assume that firefighters are recruited at higher fitness standards than is the case. The majority of existing firefighters were not recruited at fitness levels high enough to ensure they can work longer and will need the protection later in their career. Williams suggests the government consider giving firefighters more protection. At the moment, however, more than half of all existing firefighters have no protection at all.

What are the current fitness requirements for firefighters?

They say: "There are no nationally set fitness standards for the fire service ... The government has no intention of setting any national fitness standards."

Reality: Almost every fire and rescue service in the UK already has a fitness standard, mostly a VO₂ max of 42. Firefighters already get taken off the run if they cannot reach it. The Williams report says it is essential to determine minimum fitness standards across the UK and have regular fitness assessments for all to ensure these levels are maintained. It is irresponsible of government to make firefighters work to 60 and then leave the huge problem this will create to local employers to sort out.

How many current firefighters are aged 55 or over and how fit are they?

They say: "The Normal Pension Age report found that 66% of current employed

firefighters aged 55 or over would not meet a VO₂ max of 42 if individual fire services introduced such a fitness standard. However, all these firefighters are protected and will remain in their current pension scheme. No one will have to work beyond their current Normal Pension Age until beyond 2022."

Reality: The currently unprotected existing members will eventually be in the position that the 66% are in now. The difference is: they will not have any protection. Government is simply saying: "Don't worry about this, it will happen, but not for a few years – and somebody else will sort it out."

Will firefighters be sacked on capability grounds?

They say: "A report commissioned by the department established that current practice in the service is for those firefighters who lose their fitness to continue on duty while undertaking remedial training. The report found that the great majority are able to increase their fitness to the appropriate level within a couple of months."
Reality: Finally they pose the key question but, unsurprisingly, then dodge it. Williams highlights the only options: leave without a pension or face capability dismissal. The government has a great chance to provide assurances, but it has not done so.

Isn't firefighting too dangerous for a 60-year-old?

They say: "A study of hazardous occupations

found that firefighting was ranked 23rd out of 30. This was attributed to the effective management of the hazards firefighters face through training, proper equipment and the effective management of risk at incidents by senior officers."

Reality: The research cited by the government – by Stephen Roberts and published in *The Lancet* (2002) – was a comparison of fatalities in different jobs. Forcing firefighters to work longer undermines the effective management of risks to firefighters and puts public safety at risk.

What is the position for female firefighters?

They say: "Women who are recruited at sufficient fitness levels and maintain a healthy lifestyle will be able to maintain fitness until age 60."

Reality: Williams actually wrote: "There is likely to be a substantially larger proportion of women firefighters who are physically and/or medically unfit over age 55."

"Allowing firefighters to leave after age 55 on a pension that is actuarially adjusted to age 60 without penalty could be considered a reasonable way to manage expectations, and to manage any potential discriminatory issues."

It is clear that ministers are clutching at straws.

They know that 60 is hugely problematic. We know that 60 is hugely problematic.

Our advice is: Stop evading the real issues and negotiate a solution with the FBU.

scenario, 85% of firefighters will not be fit to work beyond 55. Even in the (unrealistic) best case, nearly a quarter (23%) will not be fit to work to 60.

The actuarial reduction for retiring at 55 or 57 is too high. Even under these proposals firefighters will lose a significant proportion of their pension every year for the rest of their lives.

Why are you changing the Normal Pension Age for firefighters?

They say: "A greater proportion of firefighters are being protected from the effect of the changes in the Normal Pension Age than any other large workforce."

Reality: A great deal is being made about the protection, but the reality is that it counts for nothing if you are sacked on capability grounds because you are not fit to work.

Still dealing with the **AFTERMATH**

FBU officials are still working hard to deal with the collapse of FiReControl and this government's laissez-faire approach

Firefighter control staff have been through the mill in recent years and still there is no let up, with chaotic mergers, job cuts and other changes taking place.

The legacy of the FiReControl project lives on. On 13 May this year at Westminster, the public accounts select committee took more evidence on it. Chair Margaret Hodge called FiReControl "a really awful project", "shambolic and dreadful" and "one of the worse examples of waste we have seen as a committee".

Senior civil servant Sir Bob Kerslake admitted that four of the regional control rooms remain unused and had no idea when they might be sold.

David Corner from the National Audit Office said each one costs £1.3m a year in rent and almost half a million in facilities management, utility bills and other charges.

After FiReControl was ended in 2010,

the current government put up only £83m to help fire and rescue services to pick up the pieces. Kerslake promised this would be done by 2015.

Not very brilliant

Hodge said: "You have given us a late report that says that seven of the 22 projects are already late. Two projects have slipped by up to 12 months – one by five months.

"The estimated completion dates for several projects are now three months later than originally required. There is a reduction in the overall benefits achieved. Only 30% of the planned improvements had been delivered by 2012. It does not look very brilliant."

It is not difficult to see why. Cumbria has merged with Cheshire which, along with Greater Manchester and Lancashire, is planning to go into a North West control room.

Suffolk control has merged with Cambridgeshire.

Buckinghamshire has joined the Thames Valley collaboration late in the day.

Isle of Wight control has closed, its functions transferred to Surrey.

Senior civil servants promised all the projects would come in on budget by March 2015, to which Hodge said: "Sorry to interrupt, but it is always in the future. If you actually look at where the new projects are now, you are running up to two years late on some of them. Sir Bob sits there: 'We'll finish it all by 2015.'"

"There is nothing that gives me confidence ..."

Quotations from the public accounts committee are taken from an uncorrected transcript, which is not yet an approved formal record.

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpubacc/uc110-i/uc11001.htm

Recent developments in England

The FBU and its control staff national committee (CSNC) have been working hard to manage the situation in the aftermath of this fiasco

In **Devon and Somerset**, the merger of controls took place late last year. This followed the merger of brigades in 2007.

Having one IRMP and one set of service orders helped. The process took two years and involved proper consultation with staff and FBU officials.

In **Wiltshire**, where fire control staff share the same building as police, the chief fire officer has decided to make it a

stand-alone control again. What this will mean is not yet clear.

Control staff in **Cheshire** are trying to cope with turning out two brigades, with two IRMPs, two sets of service orders and two pre-determined attendances (PDA) with the same number of people, who have had little or no training.

There are real concerns about what will happen when the regional north-west control begins, with four brigades, but only a third of the staff they have now on duty.

Similarly, **Cambridgeshire** controls now have two brigades to manage. Following an intense period of stress following the amalgamation,

Cambridgeshire is about to take on more staff, although there are still concerns about training.

CSNC chair Kath Smith said: "The common theme seems to be that if the process is done properly and the staff are involved from the start and plenty of time is given to 'manage the change' then it can work.

"But nowadays there is the knee-jerk reaction to merge or 'restructure' (cut jobs) to save money and no regard is taken for the IRMP and risk assessments – or they just move the goal posts so it still fits."

FBU SECURES COMPENSATION FOR CONTROL ROOM STAFF

The FBU has won compensation from the Isle of Wight and the Surrey fire and rescue services because they both failed to consult the union when they merged their fire control functions in March 2012.

The decision affects FBU members who staffed control rooms around the clock covering Surrey and the Isle of Wight. They will share the £83,000 compensation.

The union took the two services to an employment tribunal after they failed to consult as required by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (known as TUPE), which protect employees' terms and conditions of employment when an organisation is transferred from one owner to another. But the compensation was agreed outside the tribunal.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Surrey and the Isle of Wight fire and rescue services acknowledged that it is for the union to determine which FBU officials to consult with and full information about the measures should have been provided. This should be a signal to every other fire and rescue service that the FBU must be consulted about key decisions on the way they work."



Fig leaf for attack

The FBU says that Ken Knight's so-called efficiencies

1

Punished for our success

Knight argues that the downward trend in fires and fire deaths over the last decade justifies making further cuts to the fire and rescue service.

It is true that fires and fire deaths are down by between a third and a half over the last decade, but this is testimony to the success of the fire and rescue service.

Many of these improvements began decades ago. FBU campaigns for regulation of furniture and for fire-safer cigarettes are examples.

Some of the improvement results from societal changes – 20% of people smoke now, half the number who smoked in the 1970s.

Prevention work carried out by firefighters makes an important contribution.

The fire and rescue service can mobilise 10,000 professionals in five minutes, 24/7. There is no substitute for emergency intervention.

APEX NEWS & PICTURES



2

It's about risk, not demand

Ministers and Knight talk about "demand" and "supply", but fire and rescue emergency cover is not simply a matter of crude market forces.

Firefighters can tell politicians about the way we have dealt with significant risks in recent years, including terrorist attacks, the Olympics, huge fires and explosions, car crashes and much more.

Firefighters dealt with almost double the number of flood incidents in 2012 than they did in 2011.

What matters are the risks and, while these change over time, there needs to be adequate fire cover for the spikes of intensive activity, as well as for routine cover.

The public and the government expect fire and rescue services to be in a state of readiness to respond quickly and efficiently to all types of emergencies whenever and wherever they may occur.

3

It's about time

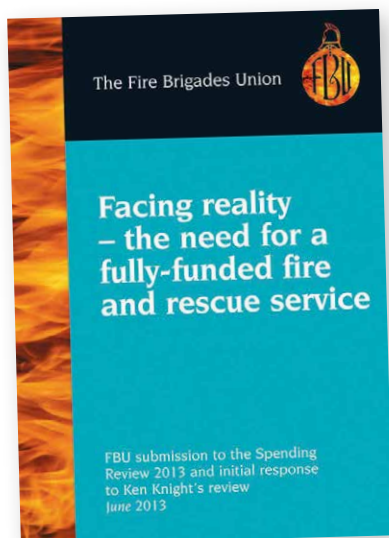
Knight ignores the slowdown in response times and the postcode lottery across the UK.

The fire minister told parliament in November 2010 that the average response time to a dwelling fire in England was 7.3 minutes. In 2006 it was 6.5 minutes; in 1996 5.5 minutes.

This means that the average response time in England is now almost two minutes slower than it was a decade or so ago. Similar slowdown has happened in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Response times continue to worsen for first appliances. The single average figure also masks wide variation in response times. Attendance targets vary perversely across the UK.

Unlike the previous requirements of the National Standards of Fire Cover, the current figures do not record the arrival of second or other appliances and therefore do not indicate whether sufficient resources are available at the right time for bigger fires.



Cuts have slowed response times

on the fire service

review of the fire and rescue service is just a hatchet job



4

Rescues still make a difference

Knight's report ignores the fact that firefighters continue to carry out very high levels of rescue from fires.

Data from individual fire and rescue services indicate that more than 7,000 people were rescued from fires in the UK between April 2009 and April 2010.

For the UK as a whole this represents nearly 600 rescues a month, or an average 19 every day of the year.

But DCLG has not published figures on rescues over the last decade. The last set of published figures, in *Fire Statistics UK 1999*, recorded just over 5,000 rescues for the UK.

The intervention of firefighters in a significant number of incidents attended still saves lives, reduces injuries and lessens the impact of fire on local communities.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack rebutted Knight's assertions on BBC television news

5

Cutting firefighters hits the frontline

Knight claims that "Firefighter numbers however have remained relatively stable over the period, only reducing by 6% in the last 10 years". This is simply not true.

In total, the UK now has over 3,500 fewer firefighters than when the coalition government came to power. This amounts to a 6% cut in frontline firefighter jobs in just three years.

There was a similar reduction in the number of wholetime firefighters in the decade before 2010. And there was also a 7% reduction in firefighters during the 1990s.

There was some increase in retained firefighters during that period, but now retained jobs are being cut. The main growth was in non-uniform support roles.

Under this government the numbers of wholetime, retained and control firefighters have been reduced.

6

Wholetime, retained and control all necessary

Knight claims that "increasing the use of on-call staff by just 10% could [save] up to £123 million per year".

The FBU represents the majority of retained firefighters in the UK, and retained firefighters do an outstanding job.

But there are a number of significant barriers to substituting retained firefighters for wholetime posts.

First, response times for retained firefighters are generally significantly slower than for wholetime crews, simply because retained firefighters are mobilised from home or their place of main employment, and have to travel from these places to the fire station before proceeding to an incident.

A second practical problem lies with the recruitment. In large parts of the UK, fire and rescue authorities have problems recruiting retained firefighters.



"The decision not to appoint Matt Wrack shows exactly what the government wants ... to smother any independence and challenge"

A large group of trade unionists, many wearing hard hats, are gathered in front of the Houses of Parliament in London. They are holding various red flags and banners. Prominent banners include "UNITY IS STRENGTH" with the TUC logo, "STOP UNION BUSTING", and "UNION OF CONFECTIONERY ALLIANCE LONDON SOUT". A large banner in the foreground reads "TRADE UNIONISTS". The background shows the ornate architecture of the Houses of Parliament, including the Elizabeth Tower clock face.

Legal Beagle

The state giveth and the state taketh away



Q How do childcare vouchers work and are there drawbacks?

A Childcare vouchers work through a “salary sacrifice” scheme in which an employee gives up the right to receive part of their salary in exchange for childcare vouchers (usually via a childcare voucher company that the employer contracts to administer the scheme).

Childcare vouchers can only be used to pay for childcare with a registered childminder or nursery registered with the childcare voucher company used by your employer.

The employer deducts the amount paid in vouchers from the employee’s taxable salary.

Neither employer nor employee pay tax or national insurance on this amount, so there are tax savings for most working parents.

But the system means that the amount of earnings on which national insurance contributions (NICs) are paid is reduced. In some cases this may take an individual’s earnings below the “lower earnings limit”.

This can have implications for things like pensions, state benefit entitlement, tax credits and work-related payments such as statutory maternity pay, sick pay and holiday pay, which are calculated on the NICs and level of earnings.

Work-related payments are based on average earnings, calculated over a fixed period, before the employee receives



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

the payments.

Statutory maternity pay (SMP) is an example. If a woman enters a salary sacrifice scheme, the amount of taxable earnings that are sacrificed may not count towards her average earnings for calculating her SMP, so the amount she will be entitled to receive could be reduced.

However employers can exercise some discretion over the level of salary used to calculate average earnings for the purposes of work-related payments. It is up to them whether they base SMP on the

employee’s salary level before or after the “sacrifice”.

Because the Grey Book that governs firefighters’ pay and conditions was prepared before the introduction of the scheme, members should check with their employers how salary sacrifice would affect work-related payments before entering the scheme.

Government plans to introduce a new scheme in 2015 that would enable working parents who are both in employment to claim up to £1,200 a year per child towards the cost of childcare.

Q I am helping a friend to navigate a way through the bureaucracy after their husband died from an industrial disease. What benefits can they apply for?

A There are three main benefits payable on the death of a spouse:

1. A bereavement payment – a one-off lump sum payment that is not means tested. As your friend’s husband died as a result of an industrial disease then the payment is not dependent on national insurance contributions. An application for a bereavement payment must be made within 12 months of the death.

2. Widowed parent’s allowance is a weekly benefit paid to widows and widowers who are parents of a child or have children living with them.

This is not subject to means testing or the deceased’s national insurance contributions because of the cause of death.

Widowed parent’s allowance ceases on remarriage and when there are no longer any children who would entitle the parent to claim child benefit.

3. Bereavement Allowance is a weekly benefit paid for up to 52 weeks to widows or widowers who were 45 or over when their spouse died but are under pensionable age. It is not means tested or subject to NICs.

Applications must be made within 52 weeks of the spouse’s death.

It is not possible to receive both widowed parent’s allowance and bereavement allowance.



Ancient rubbish is gold-dust for archaeologists

Berkshire firefighter Robin Whitman is uncovering the forgotten origins of public health care in England

When Berkshire firefighter Robin Whitman wasn't on green watch at Newbury station earlier this summer, he may well have been helping to unearth evidence that could shed fresh light on how the Anglo-Saxons cared for the sick.

Robin is studying for a BSc in archaeological practice at Winchester University, where a groundbreaking excavation is challenging the accepted historical view that hospitals arrived in England after the Norman conquest in 1066.

Excavations have revealed a range of buildings and evidence for their foundation in the 11th century.

Under expert supervision, students including Robin worked on a month-long placement at the Magdalen Hill archaeological project a mile east of the ancient royal city of Winchester. Led by academics Simon Roffey and Phil Marter, the students are helping to piece together the history and development of a medieval leper hospital and almshouses on the site.

Convincing evidence

Excavations by the Winchester University team have already revealed a range of buildings, and, says Dr Roffey, "more significantly, convincing evidence for a foundation in the 11th century".

The supervised student dig takes place against this charged backdrop. It is painstaking work – everything found on site is meticulously chronicled, co-ordinates taken and condition noted before it is cleaned and studied back at the university. Students remain involved after the dig.

"It's complex work on a live research project, where students can pit their wits and skills against the archaeology," says Dr Roffey, standing on site on a windy June afternoon with Robin and Dr Marter. "It's

a combination of quite physical hard work then careful tidying, cleaning and then the paperwork. Attention to detail is crucial."

As a seasoned firefighter, Robin, 35, is no stranger to either hard physical graft or paying attention to detail. He's always been "fascinated by history" and is obviously thrilled to be on a course that offers practical experience alongside theory.

When *Firefighter* visited, Robin had spent the morning chronicling the

condition, "context" and exact site of a hole that once housed a timber post for the medieval hospital. It's exactly scrupulous work and much care is needed when on site. It's vital not to trash evidence from hundreds and even more than 1,000 years ago by trampling unthinkingly over clues.

Earlier in the excavation, Robin found a large fragment of what Simon agreed was probably a moulded door jamb or part of a window from the chapel that used to stand



ROBIN WHITMAN

Robin Whitman is studying for a BSc in archaeological practice at Winchester University

It's not just digging. The exacting and scrupulous work required to chronicle the condition, 'context' and exact site of a hole that once housed a timber post in a medieval hospital will take all morning



on the site, one of the many buildings built on the hill over the centuries. The piece will, of course, be subjected to further scrutiny and chronicled accordingly.

Robin says there are misconceptions about archaeology. "People ask me why I'm learning how to dig holes, when I tell them I'm studying archaeology. But there's so much involved, including laser scanning and forensics."

And it is forensics, back in the lab, that have already yielded vital information in what is turning out to be a tantalising and potentially view-changing excavation at a site where digging this millennium was started by Channel 4's *Time Team*. The show's 2000 dig was cut short by bad weather, but the Winchester team was more than ready to take up the challenge.

Bodily remains have already been found – most showing the ravages of leprosy. These skeletons are challenging traditional thinking on when institutional care for the sick began in Britain.

Neatly laid out graves were found underneath the floors of medieval buildings. The project's osteo-archaeologist found evidence of leprosy in skeletons – including "marked degeneration" of facial bones and feet.

Three skeletons with evidence of leprosy

were radiocarbon tested. The first provided a 95% probability date of 1010–1160 (with a spike in the graph around 1030–40), the second gave a 65% probability of 980–1060. And the third dated with 95% probability of having leprosy between 890 and 1040 – with a clear spike between 970 and 1030.

As Phil Marter puts it: "Here is the first apparent evidence of a hospital, for lepers, in medieval England."

Treasure trove

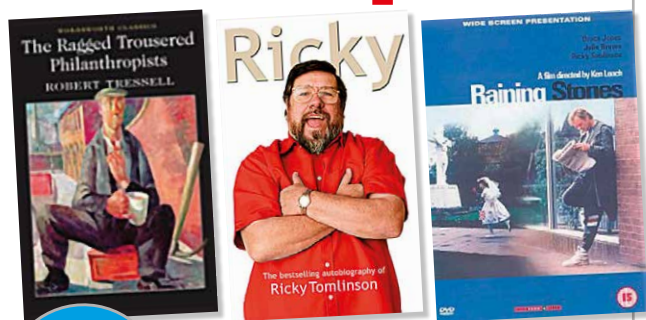
The project has much yet to yield. Staring into a midden pit, Robin, Simon and Phil talk animatedly of the secrets these rubbish dumps contain. For archaeologists, they are treasure troves of clues of food eaten, feasts enjoyed and lives lived many centuries ago.

Ancient rubbish is archaeological gold-dust. The team has already found circumstantial evidence of new-fangled Norman feasting – with snail shells retrieved amid the bones of birds.

The Winchester dig is a work in progress – and further yet-to-be-found evidence could well strengthen the case for naming it as the site of Britain's first leper hospital.

It may also show that people living in the medieval period cared for their sick in a way that has yet to be fully chronicled in history books.

Prize quiz



WIN!

ONE OF THESE PRIZES

A copy of Ken Loach's film *Raining Stones*, a copy of Ricky Tomlinson's autobiography *Ricky*, or a copy of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.

To win one of these prizes please send your answers by 31 July 2013 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (July 2013) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

- 1** Recently retired, long standing Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, was "a good mate" to ...?
- A. The labour movement
B. Wrigley's
C. Rafa Benitez
D. Hairdryers



- 2** His film directing fees
C. His movie fees
D. His brand of organic salad dressings

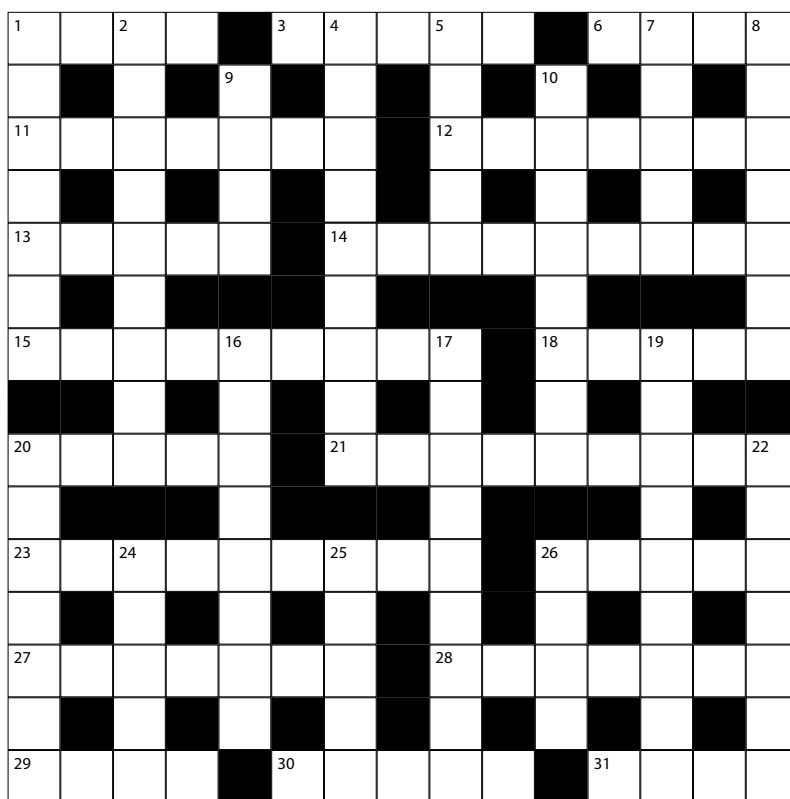
- 2** Eddie Izzard who has run many marathons for charity may turn his attention to what in 2019?
- A. An East coast - West coast run across America?
B. A comedy world tour?
C. Joining the race for Mayor of London
D. Beating David Walliams' cross channel swim time?

- 4** Sean Penn, on accepting Best Actor award (2009) for playing the part of gay activist Harvey Milk, condemned those who supported the ban on ...?
- A. Steroids
B. Gay marriage
C. Absinthe
D. Cuban cigars

- 5** Often shelved for political reasons, which of these Ken Loach films did not win an award?
- A. Land And Freedom
B. My Name Is Joe
C. The Wind That Shakes The Barley
D. Riff-Raff



- 3** Hollywood star Paul Newman, a staunch opponent of the Vietnam War, is also famous for donating all after-tax profits to charity from the sale of ...?
- A. His race cars



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Socialist island in the Caribbean (4)
3 Playful, impish or roguish youngster (5)
6 Corrosive substance (4)
11, 10 Huge June gathering against 14 (7, 8)
12 Such as Cats, Cabaret, Phantom of the Opera etc (7)
13 Inexpensive (5)
14 Programme of cuts and attacks on services and welfare (9)
15 Playwright (9)
18 Emit vital fluid, through cut, etc (6)
20 Potter's power? (5)
21 Highly flammable hydrocarbon mixed with oxygen for welding (9)
23 Helper (9)
26 Unsophisticated; vulgar (5)
27 Sugar in milk (7)
28 Point of view (7)
29 Ceremonial band of silk or similar (4)
30 'Ship of the desert' (5)
31 Forerunner of siren (4)

DOWN

- 1** Resort on eastern tip of Massachusetts (4,3)
2 Impossible to throw it away?! (9)
4 Central American country bordered by Nicaragua and Panama (5,4)
5 One of the Ms in MMR (5)
7 Spiky plants (5)
8 Later than intended; postponed (7)
9 Strike with open palm (4)
10 See 11 (8)
16 Forebear (8)
17 Pontoon - or 'age of majority' of old (6-3)
19 Body entrusted with carrying out FBU policy (9)
20 One of the Ms in MMR (7)
22 Everlasting (7)
24 Footwear worn inside footwear (5)
25 Venue for sporting or cultural spectacle (5)
26 Such pans are a fire-hazard (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution May-June

May-June quiz answers

- 1** A - Taxation law
2 A - Education secretary
3 A - The enemy within
4 D - The next century
5 B - Poll tax

Winner of the April quiz

Ralph Twiss, Lancashire

Station Cat

Easy away


win for FBU

team on TV

Their cup runneth over

 Picture the heroic scene. It's the fire services' cup final. An all-Scottish affair this year, hotly contested between Strathclyde and Central fire and rescue services at New Douglas Park in Hamilton. Before the match, firefighters mount a demonstration for the benefit of the many youthful fans who showed up. Then the pumps go back to the station, and Strathclyde proceed to beat Central 3-0. The triumphant Strathclyde footballers go back to their dressing room and open the champagne. The champagne sets off the fire alarms. All the pumps have to come back double quick and the stadium is evacuated. Red faces all round, reports our man on the terraces.

Spinning out of control

 The black arts of media manipulation are alive and well under the coalition. The release of Sir Ken Knight's report into the future of the fire and rescue service was a masterclass in how it's done. Some Tory politician must have asked the spin doctors: "How do we get across the message that cutting the fire service is OK, and make sure the FBU doesn't get the chance to say: 'Oh, no, it isn't.'?" Here's the answer the spin doctors came up with.

Release Sir Ken's report during the FBU conference, when all the union's national

officials are in Blackpool.

Make sure no one knows the day you're going to release it.

Release it at six in the morning. That means it's too late for the newspapers, but perfect for broadcasting. With newspapers, the FBU could just issue a statement, but for broadcasting they've got to get people to studios in London and Manchester – not easy when you're in Blackpool.

Give it to the broadcasters in advance, on condition they don't show it to the FBU. So the FBU sees it at 6am. With a bit of luck, by the time the union finds out what's in it, it'll be too late.

The cat is delighted to report that the plan misfired. That morning, general secretary Matt Wrack raced off to a local BBC studio to do morning radio and TV, and national officers Dave Green and John McGhee spent the day fielding everything else. Government spin doctors Nil: FBU 1.

With the greatest respect

 Not so the RFU, a small organisation that supports cuts in the service. Some time that morning it sent out a rather sad but very respectful statement: "By way of a holding statement, the RFU welcomes in principle Sir Ken Knight's report into the fire service.

"We need to fully digest the contents of the report which has only become available to us this morning, but

in essence the report appears to mirror the stance we have been taking for many years that efficiency savings within the service have yet to be fully realised ...

"A more detailed response will be provided later today when we have had time to fully digest the report."

For all your cat knows, a more detailed response was provided. If so, no one noticed.

A clever plan designed to silence the FBU – which opposes cuts – succeeded only in silencing the RFU, which supports cuts.

Coleman kerbed

 The Cat doesn't like kicking a man when he's down, but she'll make an exception if the man is Brian Coleman. The former chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) admitted in court assaulting cafe owner Helen Michael in Finchley High Road as she filmed him parking illegally on a street where he had helped introduce unpopular parking charges.

It will cost Coleman £1,385 and his political career.

Everyone who watched Coleman at LFEPA will know what Ms Michael meant when she told the court: "I think he's bullied and intimidated people for a long, long time and I think he has now got what has been long overdue."


After he was charged, Coleman was suspended by his party and stripped of his council committee duties.

On message: FBU general secretary Matt Wrack was live on BBC television rebutting the Knight report within hours of its 6am release


STEFANO CAGNONI



Independent advice

 Stop press. Apparently Coleman is to make a last-ditch attempt to revive his political career by standing as an independent for Barnet Council in Totteridge. Should you live there, you might want to look at this website: <http://101reasonstosackbriancoleman.tumblr.com>.

Marginally dishonest

 Here's another grubby trick David Cameron has picked up from New Labour: the slanted questionnaire. He sent a questionnaire accompanied by a personal letter to targeted voters in marginal seats, David Hencke reveals in *Tribune* magazine. He tried to make it look like a simple attempt to evaluate how the government is doing and asking for advice on how to continue existing policies. But it is cynically designed to stoke up resentment against the unemployed.

Cameron asks people to choose between two statements: "How well I do in life is first and foremost down to me."

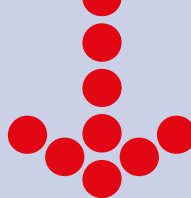
OR

"How well I do in life is primarily decided by forces outside of my control."

And how's this for a leading question: "Should out of work benefits be the same, regardless of how many years you have paid National Insurance/income tax?" Could Cameron be thinking about targeting the young unemployed and immigrants? Surely not.



25-year badges



Andy Bailey (r), green watch, Kirkby, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Les Skarratts



Gary Southam (l), Hereford and Worcester, receives his 25-year badge from branch representative Kevin Harris



Bob Wilson (r), blue watch, Stanks, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary David Williams



Cumbria officers' branch secretary (retired) **Mike McMinn** (l), receives his 25-year badge from officers branch official Paul Hanby with current and former officer branch members



Richard Dance (l) and **Prad Verma** (c), Highfields, Nottingham, receive their 25-year badges from branch secretary Ian Young



Steve Green (r), Preston, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from Lancashire brigade chair Kevin Deacon with members of white watch looking on



John Hampson (l), red watch, Preston, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from Lancashire brigade chair Kevin Deacon



Mat Rosendale (r), green watch, Brixton, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch representative Paul Eveson



Steve Ismail (r), green watch, Brixton, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch representative Paul Eveson



Dave Shepherd (r), green watch, Lowedges, South Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martin Farmer



Steve Anderson (r), Plymstock, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Gould



Chris Johnson (l), red watch, Lowedges, South Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martin Farmer



Dave Whittaker (r), red watch, Lowedges, South Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martin Farmer



Mark Arnott (r), Silvertown, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU London rep Ben Hayes

Please send prints or digital files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk. Please include full details for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.